



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## Testimony :: Nazim Imanov

**Deputy Chairman - National Independence Party of Azerbaijan**

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Nazim Imanov

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National Independence Party of Azerbaijan

"Elections, Democratization and Human Rights in Azerbaijan"

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to thank the US Congress for its attention to human rights issues worldwide, and to express the hope that this hearing will become another strong element of partnership between Azerbaijan and United States in the area of democracy and respect to human rights. We in the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan assume that the US congressional hearings will promote renewed US assistance to Azerbaijan in strengthening its democratic institutions.

This year is crucial for Azerbaijan's democracy. Understanding of that I found in the text of invitation letter you sent to the participants of this hearing. If parliamentary elections of November 5, 2000 follow the tradition established by our country's decade of independence, then citizens of Azerbaijan will be forced to wait a long time for a new opportunity for positive and peaceful historical change. By the way, this wrong tradition comprises not only domestic problems, but also an international one - the tradition of extremely moderate international reaction to election fraud.

If citizens can not exercise their formal right to change their government at free and fair elections, then democratic political activism and participation fade out. This creates favorable conditions for different sorts of authoritarian rule or dictatorship. Lack of government accountability to the parliament, as well as lack of transparency in the government, undermine economic growth. Both these trends are clearly visible in the present-day Azerbaijan: voters' turnout is declining dramatically year after year, and foreign investors are leaving the country almost in a rush because of Azerbaijan's corruption index being just the same of Nigeria's and Indonesia's.

Economic devastation and inefficiency are becoming an imminent result of lack of democratic guarantees to property rights, government transparency, and political freedom. Our party views the strongly protected property rights, and economic freedoms as the most reliable and lasting basis for democratic institutions in Azerbaijan.

Irregularities of the 1998 presidential elections, where Chairman of our Party Mr. Etibar Mamedov was the main opponent to Mr. Heydar Aliyev, are described very well in the 1999 Human Rights Report of the US Department of State. Result of voting by polling stations - the only true legal evidence of the current president's real electoral performance - are not made public so far, although the legal deadline for publishing these reports were 10 days after the end of voting. By the way, 7 members of our party are still imprisoned because they took part in a rally protesting the non-publication of official reports by polling stations.

Courts do not accept any appeals of opposition about election irregularities. This is just one element showing the real status of judiciary in Azerbaijan. There are much more examples from other areas which prove that courts in Azerbaijan enjoy no independence from the executive power.

It is worth of noting here that the election fraud in 1998 took place just a year after Heydar Aliyev's visit to Washington DC, where two presidents signed a joint statement. In that official document President Clinton welcomed President Aliyev's commitment to hold free and fair elections.

Despite all mistakes of the past, people of our country still maintain their belief in the potential of democracy. Parliamentary elections of 2000 would be a final test not only for the strength of this belief, but also for the reputation of democratic countries among ordinary Azerbaijani voters. National Independence Party of Azerbaijan will do all its best to mobilize voters in this crucial year. However, we need good laws, and proper law implementation to ensure that votes will be counted, and people will be heard. The issue of democratization should not become a pretext for restrictions against Azerbaijani state because such sanctions, just like Section 907, would make all people in Azerbaijan suffer, and would have no effect on the government. Combined efforts of democrats in Azerbaijan and in the West - with respect to sovereignty, independence and other fundamental achievements of Azerbaijani nation - this is what we really need for democratic prosperity in our country.

In the end, I would like to draw your attention to one recent publication. Last week the official "Xalq Qezeti" newspaper in Azerbaijan wrote that Mr. Christopher Smith was summoning opposition parties to instruct them about the composition of the new parliament, which would play an important role in future government changes. Of course, National Independence Party of Azerbaijan does not share such perception of the current event, as you can feel from this presentation.

Thank you very much for your attention.